

Point Them to Glory!

Christ's Call to Elders

Ben Stahl

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This booklet is derived from a seminar on the office of ruling elders that was given in October 2024 to the Presbytery of the Southeast of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. The audio and video versions of that seminar can be found by scanning the below QR codes.



Part 1



Part 2

To my father,
who faithfully pointed me to
Christ and points me still.

Why a Booklet on Elders?

Each year seminaries and churches will hold preaching conferences. Some churches have diaconal summits. There are mission conferences, youth rallies, family camps, and singles retreats. Little is done around the office of elder. Why? Perhaps the topic is considered too obvious and not worthy of particular focus. Perhaps the topic lacks excitement at a time when the church needs to attract younger men to the office. Whatever the reasons, I would like us to think of the office of elder as a vital topic for consideration. There are at least three reasons for this perspective.

The first reason is that elders are necessary for the church. The Lord proves as much in the book of Acts. “So when they had appointed elders (presbyters) in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.”¹

Irish presbyterian minister Edward Donnelly gave a series of sermons on the office of ruling elder some years ago and noted that for the first 70-80 years of the reformed church in Ireland it functioned without an ordained minister or teaching elder. The churches gathered with ruling elders. A minister would come a few times a year from Scotland to administer the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. For multiple generations, the church survived and thrived under elders alone.

Not a few churches have been without pastors for extended periods of time. The elders had to lead the congregation until that time God provided a full-time minister to labor among them. Elders are necessary for the body of Christ. What is necessary for the body is worthy of the church taking time to consider.

The second reason to consider the topic of elders is that God appoints elders. “For this reason, I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking and appoint elders (presbyters) in every city as I commanded you.”² While it is evident that men lay their hands on another man to ordain him as an elder, it is the Holy Spirit that makes elders. “Therefore, take heed to yourselves and to all the flock,

¹ Acts 14:23

² Titus 1:5

among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”³

Peter considered himself an apostle, yes, but also a fellow elder. “The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ.”⁴ Peter did not cease being an apostle or condescend with that title, he acknowledged it was an office established by the Lord that He was more than happy to identify with alongside his fellow elders. The office of elder is a vital topic because the Lord appoints elders.

The third reason to consider the topic of elders is that elders point people to Christ. “Shepherd the flock of God which is among you... and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.”⁵ The crown of glory is not for the elder that lost the flock, beat down the flock, scattered the flock, or devoured the flock. The crown of glory is for the shepherd whose flock meets the good Shepherd in glory.

Any man that reads 1 Peter 5 thinking merely of the honor of the office has missed the mark. The office is an intensely weighty calling. Some elders have utterly despised God in the office and made shipwreck of their calling to the damage of many souls. Who has not come dangerously close to doing this very thing? Some feel temptation to sin in this particular manner even now. Pride and power are not what the office of elder is about. The elder will bear greater judgment on the day of the Lord.⁶ May all active and aspiring elders read and tremble before the Lord. Let us repent and cease from sin.

When John the Baptizer saw Jesus, He pointed all men to Him crying out, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.”⁷ The faithful elder points the flock of Christ to the Good Shepherd of the flock. “Behold, Jesus Christ, the Savior of Sinners!” “Repent and believe in Him and have everlasting life!” The topic of elders is vital because the elder points the sheep to Christ.

Many Reformed churches require elders at the time of their ordination to make the following vow before God and His church. “Do

³ Acts 20:28

⁴ 1 Peter 5:1

⁵ 1 Peter 5:2,4

⁶ James 3:1

⁷ John 1:29

you promise to seek the purity, the peace, and the unity of the church?” Elders are not merely called to maintain the appearance of peace, purity, and unity. Elders are called to actually maintain the peace, purity, and unity of the church. They are to do so in such a manner that will glorify the Chief Shepherd who will soon appear.

With these positive reasons for considering the topic of elder, the rest of this booklet considers Christ’s call to elders. “If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?”⁸ If the foundations are destroyed, what can the elder do? Let the foundation of the elder be right, then he may build the walls higher. What has God called an elder to do?

⁸ Psalm 11:3

Elders Must Love Christ

So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Feed My lambs."

He said to Him again a second time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Tend My sheep."

He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, you know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Feed My sheep."

Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish." This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, "Follow Me."⁹

On the night of Christ's greatest trial, the night on which He was betrayed, mocked, beaten, scourged, crowned with thorns, pierced, crucified, and killed, one of His dearest friends added insult to His injury. Peter denied Christ three times. These weren't the muffled shrugs of a cowardly acquaintance. Peter, the rock, cursed and blasphemed Christ's name. He feared a servant girl more than he feared the Lord. While Christ was being examined for His very life, one of His dearest friends would not take the mildest shame for being numbered among Christ followers.

Peter's betrayal is difficult to compare. Greater than Peter's sin, however, is the meeting between Peter and Jesus over breakfast some days following Christ's death and resurrection. As Jesus and His disciples gathered around to eat, Jesus turned to His beloved friend Peter and asked, "Do you love Me?" He did not ask just once or twice, but three times. "Do you love Me?"

Do you love Jesus? This is the first pillar in the Christian life. The Christian must love Christ who first loved him. The elder may be

⁹ John 21:15-19

required to do more but he certainly must not do less. The elder must love Christ. To the elder and apostle Peter, Jesus asked, “Do you love Me?” The question that every elder and prospective elder must ask themselves as they rule, as they pursue peace purity and unity of the church is this, “Do I love Christ?” Elders, perspective elders, do you love Christ? There are five tests or prerequisites for loving Christ.

First, the elder must know Christ in order that he might love Christ. Jesus’s questions were not surprising to Peter. Peter knew his own sin. Peter had fled from the presence of Christ when Jesus looked over at him on that fateful night. Peter did not respond to the question with a mere acknowledgement of Christ. When Jesus asked His question three times, three times Peter replied, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” Peter confessed Jesus as Lord, ruler, king, God. He confessed Christ’s omniscience. Peter knew Christ with a saving knowledge. Previously Peter had famously confessed, “You are the Christ!”¹⁰ At breakfast, Peter confessed, “Lord, I love you.”

Do you know Christ? I suspect you have professed as much, and I am not intending to question anyone’s profession. More than anything else, as we think about the office of elder, let us be certain that we know Christ and love Christ.

Some have pursued office in the church because they love Reformed theology and the doctrine of Christ. So far as it is faithful to God’s word, you must love Reformed theology and the doctrine of Christ. Nevertheless, love for doctrine alone is not sufficient to be a Christian, let alone an elder.¹¹ A good husband does not merely love good things about his wife. He loves his wife. A Christian does not merely love things about God; he loves God. A godly elder must not merely love things about Christ. He must love Christ. No one can faithfully serve God who does not know Christ. You must know Christ.

Second, the elder must trust Christ because He loves Christ. Peter did not run into the wilderness after the resurrection to escape the wrath of God due to him for his sin. Rather, he ran to meet Christ for breakfast. He swam to him – jumping out of the boat to get to Christ quicker than the boat would take him. He trusted that Christ had died on the cross a few days earlier for him personally. The blood of Christ was sufficient to wash away his sin of betrayal. There was nowhere else

¹⁰ Matthew 16:16

¹¹ James 2:19

Peter could go; no one else had the words of eternal life. Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, the Savior of sinners. Peter trusted Him!

“Yes, Lord!” Peter made the good confession in the eyes of many witnesses. This is the model for all elders – we must trust Christ with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind. Saving faith receives Christ, rests in Christ, trusts in Christ alone for salvation as Christ is freely offered in the gospel. What conflicts are brewing and are even happening now? How will you get through them? Will you give up on the church? Will you give in to sin? Will you give way to error? How will you avoid these pitfalls? Trust Christ!

Third, elders must follow Christ to show that they love Christ. The 144,000 in heaven were redeemed from the earth for they are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes.¹² When Jesus was by the sea and saw Matthew at the receipt of custom He said to Him, “Follow Me.” Levi left his lucrative business and followed Christ to the end (likely suffering a martyr's death).

An elder that loves Christ must follow Him. Following Christ is not just the call at the beginning, for the first year or two after ordination. The call is to follow Christ to the end. “Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken afterward, but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.”¹³

This is a most challenging task. The church member comes and tells you something he plans to do. It is culturally acceptable but contrary to God's word. You may be tempted to smile and say, “ok,” or worse yet, “good luck.” God calls you to follow Christ. You love Christ and therefore must tell the church member the way they should go. They must hold the hope firm to the end and so must you.

Bruce Hunt was led off to prison by the Japanese guards and the Korean Christians lined the way saying, “To the end,” “To the end.” The peace, purity, unity, growth of the church will be kept by elders who love Christ to the end. Faithful elders follow Christ. So, Jesus, after asking

¹² Revelation 14:3-4

¹³ Hebrews 3:5-6

Peter the questions over breakfast concluded in this way: “And when He had spoken this, He said to Him, ‘Follow Me.’”

Fourth, elders must be born again of the Spirit to be able to love Christ. This is the sum of all that has come before. You must be born again! How can an elder be an example of godliness if He has not been born again of the Spirit? The work of an elder is not natural. To do it well he must have the aid of the Holy Spirit.

It is not the highest educated called to be elders. Churches need to be on guard against making academic achievement the leading criteria for elders. Worldly achievement is not God’s criteria. God committed His requirements for office to writing. Elders must be: “Blameless as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.”¹⁴ Who can stand and say he is all these things? Certainly not me. With repentance, humility, and boldness in Christ, let us press for the mark.

Elders need the gospel preached to them as well as the rest of the church. I once heard about a minister in Georgia who came to realize that several of the elders in his church were not saved. Their spiritual state made his labor exceedingly difficult. But he pressed on and to remarkable success for the glory of the Lord and the salvation of souls.

Mr. Rees was a good friend of Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones and the key driver for Lloyd-Jones’s first pastoral call in Aberavon, Wales. Mr. Rees later confessed that he was unconverted at the time Martyn Lloyd-Jones came as pastor. Rees was converted not long after Jones’s arrival.

If I may plead with you today with what I believe is the appeal of Scripture. If an elder reads this and realizes he has been laboring for the honor of His own name or any number of self-centered reasons and has not turned to the Lord in faith, may this be the last day of such folly. You must not think about shame to your name, shock in your church, or any ridicule from others, when you confess your spiritual state. Instead, you must think about your eternal soul. God is not fooled. “Except a man be

¹⁴ Titus 1:7-9

born again he cannot enter the kingdom of Heaven.”¹⁵ You must repent of your sin and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ while it is called “today”.

What greater testimony than one in the position of elder confessing the Lord truly from the heart who had but confessed Christ merely in an outward manner in time past. Elders, do you love Christ?

Finally, elders that love Christ must be compelled by love in all that they do for Christ. Some years ago, an elder at a church in Pennsylvania began writing at the top of his session, presbytery, and General Assembly notes something like the following – “Remember the love of Christ.” With that at the top reminding him of his chief motivation in ruling well he went ahead in his labor with the earnest desire for the glory of Christ’s name and the good of His church.

Paul’s motivation for serving Christ is written down in the inspired word: “The love of Christ compels us!”¹⁶ This is not primarily a verse about our love for Christ. Rather, it is about Christ’s love for us. The love of Christ is not that we loved Him but that He first loved us and laid down His life for us. His great love for us, to the extent of dying on the cross for our sins, compels us to all love and service for Him.

When an elder loves Christ, the peace of the church is his desire. Christ is the prince of peace. What else can he pursue? The love of Christ compels Him!

When an elder loves Christ, the purity of the church is his desire. Christ is pure and His ways, word, and works are pure. Therefore, the elder wants to be Christlike in his work. The love of Christ compels him!

When an elder loves Christ, the unity of the church is His end for Christ shed His blood for His church. The elder loves that unity and desires to maintain it. The love of Christ compels Him!

When an elder loves Christ and is tempted, tried, and sometimes falling into sin, he remembers Christ’s promise and obediently confesses His sin to the Lord and the offended parties. The love of Christ compels him!

When an elder loves Christ his highest hope, deepest prayers, earnest desire is for the members of the church to love Christ. He

¹⁵ John 3:3

¹⁶ 2 Corinthians 5:14

teaches and tells the truth, weeping even for the conversion of the children, the wandering, the wayward, the worldly. The love of Christ compels him!

The elders in Ephesus forgot their first love and the candlestick was ready to be put out. Elders may the Love of Christ compel you on in your work until you see Christ face to face in glory! Here is the first call to elders: Elders must love Christ.

Elders Must Love God's Word

Jesus said to Peter, "Feed my lambs." How would Peter feed the lambs of Christ? He would give them Christ. They would eat of His flesh and drink of His blood. How? By feeding on His word. Peter went on to preach the word. John went on to preach the word. Paul went on to preach the word.

Paul went to Ephesus reminding the men to take heed to themselves and the flock. How would they take heed? Remembering what Paul preached, taught, and wrote among them. But more than that, "I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance... and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, It is more blessed to give than to receive."¹⁷ The second essential quality of an elder is that he must love God's word. Three elements define that love for the word.

First, elders that love God's word must be students of the word. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete thoroughly equipped for every good work."¹⁸ Let us go further, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God."¹⁹ Elders must be in the word of God, that is a given. They must be devoted to the word of God. There must be no greater word for them. As much as they love Calvin, Owen, Lloyd-Jones, and Spurgeon, they must love the Bible more. It must be on their minds daily, hourly is better.

As students of the word elders are ready to give an answer from the living powerful source of truth they know, love, and have studied. The peace, purity, and unity of the church will not be maintained without the word of God. Elders must be students of that word.

Second, elders must be followers of the word. By "followers" I mean elders must treasure the word, love the word, hide the word in their hearts, delight in the word, rejoice at its promises, tremble at its threatenings, worship its Christ, hold fast to it, and seek to obey it at all costs. David said, "Oh, how love I Your law! It is my meditation all the

¹⁷ Acts 20:31 – 32, 35

¹⁸ 2 Timothy 3:16

¹⁹ Luke 4:4

day. You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies; for they are ever with me.”²⁰

This is not a call for following the word merely on account of the Bible’s academic beauty, unity of the parts, wonder of its doctrine, or philosophical answers. The Bible has all those things. Nevertheless, the love of the word that an elder must have in order to follow it, is a love that flows like a spring of life from the inward work of the Spirit. The elder considers God and His word and says: “Lord, to whom should we go? You have the words of eternal life.”²¹

A missionary wife whose husband died young treasured the letters he sent her in their engagement and short marriage for the rest of her days. They brought her comfort and joy, even in his absence. How much more must elders love the word God gave them? It does not merely bring sentimental memories, but it is living, powerful, sharp, discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart!²²

The elder follows God’s word because it is eternal. “Forever O Lord, your word is settled in heaven.”²³ The Bible shows the elder the way of salvation “You have dealt well with Your servant, O Lord, according to Your word.”²⁴ It is more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold, sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.”²⁵ The word must be on the mind of the elder, in his heart, on his lips, and lead him wherever he goes. Then he can call back the wayward, warn the unrepentant, comfort the mourning, strengthen the weak, encourage the strong. Elders must be followers of the word. As much as elders must be followers of the word, they have a further duty.

Third, elders must be tellers of the word. Perhaps redundant for the office of elder but it must be said. An elder that loves Christ and loves His church must tell and teach the word that he loves. While on vacation last year my family and I visited a reformed church for worship. The worship service began with a quote from a liberal theologian. The quote was also on the front of the bulletin. It was a nonsensical quote

²⁰ Psalm 119:97-98

²¹ John 6:68

²² Hebrews 4:12-13

²³ Psalm 119:89

²⁴ Psalm 119:65

²⁵ Psalm 19:10

as most of those are but that is how the worship service began. Superfluous to say, “elders must tell the word? Maybe not.

If you love Christ, you will feed His flock with Christ. That is to preach the word of God and proclaim God’s gospel concerning His Son. In reformed traditions elders exhort and pastors preach. However you feel most comfortable explaining your work with this book the Bible, elders tell God’s word to the flock.

In our present age, elders can be intimidated by how people feel when they tell them the word. Nevertheless, that is the calling. We must do it with love, we must do it with truth, we must do it with urgency, and we must do it! God has given His word graciously to teach, instruct, warn, rebuke. Let elders use it.

One of the most moving and motivating accounts of Scripture is the death of Stephan at the end of Acts 7. Stephen was put to death. Why? For declaring the word of God to the people. Telling the word comes with a cost. The world will not love us for it. In some situations, church members may not love us for telling them the word. There could be cases where fellow presbyters do not want to hear God’s word. But we must love Christ to the extent that we tell the word even when it is not popular, pleasant, or particularly healthy to do so. The flock survives by the word of God and the God of the word. Elders must love Christ by loving God’s word and teaching it to the flock.

May the Love of Christ compel you to greater love for Him and great love for His word.

Elders Must Love God's Lambs

Three times Peter denied Christ. Three times Jesus asked Peter, "Do you love me?" Three times Peter responded, yes Lord! Jesus didn't stop there and eat fish with Peter. Jesus had instruction for Peter. Jesus gave an imperative. He gave Him a command. You must do this Peter! You must do this elders! "Feed My lambs!"

Why such an urgent command days before Jesus would ascend into glory? There are at least three reasons for Christ's command and three reasons for elders to love God's flock.

First, elders must love Christ's lambs because Christ died for the church. Paul told the elders at Ephesus: "Therefore, take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood."²⁶

What do you think of the blood of Christ? Christ purchased the church with His blood. He didn't purchase one person here or one person there – He purchased a whole kingdom of people. Prior to Jesus's death on the cross He prayed: "I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours. And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them."²⁷ He prayed for His church.

As Jesus hung dying on the cross there was blood dripping from his head, his hands, his feet. Why was He dying? Why did He die? It was for the church. It was for the children of Abraham that would number as many as the sand on the seashore and the stars in the sky.

Jesus offered Himself a willing sacrifice to the Father so that His church might be redeemed. We must be careful against limiting Christ's death to those who treat us well – He died for His church. Because Christ died for the church, elders must love the church for whom Christ died.

The church is going to make errors. Members may hurt you. Sometimes sheep bite. Whole denominations may fail and fall into great difficulties. The temptation will come to give up, start a home church,

²⁶ Acts 20:28

²⁷ John 17:9-10

become part of the unchurched. Whatever your situation, God provides the motivation to keep going in serving the King. Christ died for the church.

Second, elders must love God's flock because Christ loves His flock. "Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him."²⁸

It is an obvious outpouring of the first point, and we will say it here plainly: Jesus loves those for whom He died. They are His children. He died for the church because He loves the church. "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends."²⁹ "And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him... we love Him because He first loved us."³⁰

Much foolishness has been said about God's love. God's attribute of love has been abused to the point where we almost don't like to speak of it. Perhaps it almost seems like a wimpy word. Let us not think such a thing concerning God's description of Himself. God is love and He loves His church. Elders must love the people of God because God loves the people of God.

"Ah, but that sheep keeps biting me.... All they do is criticize me... they ask the same questions over and over... they are a thorn in my side..." For such sheep Christ came and He loves His sheep. Love the flock because Christ loved the flock.

It's easy to love those who love us. May we even love those that hate us. May all the world know that we are from God because we love one another.

Third, elders must love God's flock because Christ is coming for His church. Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 4:16, "For the LORD Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first."

Friend, Christ is the resurrection and the life everlasting. He is coming again to raise the body of everyone who ever lived. Those who

²⁸ 1 John 4:14-15

²⁹ John 15:13

³⁰ 1 John 4:16,19

are Christ's and have already died will rise first. Those of us yet living will rise with them and together we will meet Christ in the air and be with Him forever.

Here is a great description of the immeasurable love of Christ for His people – He will be with them for all eternity. Are we loving the flock and preparing the flock of Christ for eternity? What would Christ say to you today on review of your work as an elder?

The day is coming when all elders will be called to give an account for the care that they exercised over Christ's flock. How was flock tended? Were they fed well? Were they told the truth? Were they loved with the word and deed? Or, were stumbling blocks put in front of them? Did the elder demand brick to be made without straw? Did the elder overlook gross sin and withhold the truth from them so that they went far astray from Christ?

Elders, let this motivation drive your service for the Lord and His sheep – Christ is coming for the church! For this reason, fear the Lord, love the church, and seek her beauty and good throughout your labors. Then when the Good Shepherd appears, you may hear the joyful words of the Savior, "Well done."

Elders Must Love the Lost

Perhaps it is superfluous to highlight the disciples call to seek the lost. Jesus told His disciples to follow Him and they would become fishers of men. Seeking the lost was the great commission of the disciples and it is no less the great commission of the church and its elders today. Nevertheless, at the present time there is some measure of discomfort by minister and elder alike at the idea of seeking the lost. The church is largely secluded to the four walls of the building. Compared to the whole number of elders, evangelistic elders are few.

Some would find it disgraceful to go to the neighborhood and hand out tracts or stand on a street corner near the church and tell people about Christ. And yet, more than those minimal efforts are called for. Elders must stop fishing without nets. They must cast the net into the water if they seek to draw the lost to Christ. They must recognize the terror of Hell and remember that all are going there apart from Christ. They must warn the lost of the pending disaster. Who will seek to catch what he does not love? Elders must love the lost and desire their salvation. There are three ways elders must love the lost.

First, elders must love the lost by seeking the lost. Ezekiel rebuked the elders of Judah in this way: "The weak you have not strengthened, nor have you healed those who were sick, nor bound up the broken, nor brought back what was driven away, nor sought what was lost."³¹

Nothing drives the church forward like seeing life come from the dead. Christ rose from the dead and the fearful disciples became the fearless proclaimers of Christ crucified. May we never forget Eutychus. "And they brought the young man in alive, and they were not a little comforted."³² The Greek word is παρακαλέω (parakaleō), to encourage, comfort, strengthen. Watching the dead man come to life no doubt drove the Ephesian church forward in their mission even as Paul was leaving them for the last time. They were greatly encouraged, strengthened, and comforted as a church.

Elders, the dead are still coming to life. When a dead sinner is born again of the Spirit, is washed clean of his sin, repents, and puts his

³¹ Ezekiel 34:4

³² Acts 20:9-12

trust in Christ alone for salvation, life has come to the dead! When is the last time you or your church saw this type of new life?

Perhaps you have heard sentiments like this from reformed Presbyterians: “The Baptists save them, and we reform them.” Let me suggest that if any church holds such an opinion, it ought to close its doors and send its people to a Baptist church! God knows of no such church. God forbid that any elder or church be concerned merely with progressive sanctification to the exclusion of regeneration, conversion, and salvation. Peter, our fellow elder went to Cornelius house and all his neighbors. Christ went to Samaritans, the Greeks, the lost! Elders must seek the lost for our Savior seeks the lost.

Second, elders must love the lost by calling the lost. The commission of the church is not for pastors only. It is not even for subset of pastors only, the evangelists. Timothy my son – “do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.”³³ Perhaps evangelism is so infrequent by pastors because elders don’t wish to be caught standing for Christ outside the walls of the church. Charles Wesley once said, “having been all my life (till very lately) so tenacious of every point relating to decency and order, I should have thought the saving of souls almost a sin if it had not been done in a church.” Wesley’s original view seems to be flourishing among many elders.

Perhaps evangelism isn’t happening because elders think everyone that comes into the church is saved. They do little evangelism inside the church; how could they be expected to do any outside the church? May you remember that there were ten virgins in the visible kingdom in Matthew 25 and just 50% went into the marriage supper of the lamb. May evangelism happen inside the church that the foolish may become wise. May evangelism happen outside the church that the lost might be found.

Let me press this point of evangelism for elders just a bit more. What happens when soldiers have no mission? They brawl among themselves. Someone once asked Lord Horatio Nelson why it was his sailors spent so much time repeating remedial, perhaps unnecessary, tasks on the ship. He answered to the effect that they worked hard in order that they would not fight each other.

³³ 2 Timothy 4:5

Nothing revives the church and grants unity in the Spirit, like the lost coming into it. Nothing drives the church like being in the Spiritual warfare and knowing it. Nothing propels the church forward like pleading with God for that one sinner who has come in or those ten whom the devil seeks to pluck away. With all the energy you would expend toward a loved one on the brink of suicide, you elders must plead with God to save the lost, bring them in from the world of sin.

When we stop the primary tasks we have been given by our Captain we start brawling among each other. It is always the case. We must be about the business of the Lord. The good Shepherd seeks the sheep. He “will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land... I will seek what was lost and bring back what was driven away... I will save my flock!”³⁴ Elders, you are the means God has ordained for the lost to be called.

Third, elders must love the lost by pointing all to glory. Long ago William Cowper wrote the following lines:

*There is a fountain filled with blood
Drawn from Emmanuel's veins
And sinners plunged beneath that flood
Lose all their guilty stains.*

If it has not been made clear already, let each elder understand his call very plainly now: Point them to the fountain! If you point them through the wicket gate and on to the celestial city and have done nothing else but point, you should have served well for the Master. If you should point them to the cross, to the blood of Christ that washes away sin, to the empty tomb and the risen, ascended, returning Christ, you will be numbered among the good and faithful servants.

If you should point them incorrectly, off by one degree of the compass, so that they should find themselves next to, adjacent to, or wide of that narrow gate that leads to life, you will have failed. Wide is the gate and broad is the path that leads to destruction and many there are who find it. But narrow is the gate and narrow is the way that leads to heaven and few there are who find it.³⁵ If you have found that narrow gate, if God has brought you there, point others there! Show them the way. Cause not a little one to stumble but faithfully point them to Christ.

³⁴ Ezekiel 34:11, 13, 16)

³⁵ Matthew 7:13-14

Elders Must Point

We started here, we have continued here, and we will end here: Elders point! Point the way to glory with your example. Point the way to Christ with your words. Point the way with your love for Christ, His word, and His lambs! Whatever you do as an elder, point, point, point, to Christ Jesus! There is no other way to glory but through Christ.

Friends, my goal has been to lay out the glorious call of Christ to the elders whom He has appointed. Love Christ. Love His word. Love His church. Love and seek the lost. The elder that does these things with humility, repentance when falling short, and full confidence in the Spirit who is his help, will surely hear the great words of Christ at that great day, “Well done you good and faithful servant.”

As Jesus spoke to betraying Peter during breakfast, He did so with much gentleness. Christ numbered Peter among the brethren. Christ died for Peter. As He called Peter to feed and tend the lambs, Christ demonstrated that God cares for His sheep through those fallen men he has ordained for that calling. All elders are sinners. Some will prove themselves to be nothing more than wolves. And yet, the perfect God still uses imperfect men for the advancement of His perfect Kingdom.

The effect of Peter’s breakfast meeting with Christ was as follows: Peter went from running from Christ and cursing His name to preaching Christ the power and wisdom of God. Peter ran from Christ’s crucifixion but then went to his own crucifixion upside down, even as He once said, “I will lay down my life for your sake.”³⁶ What changes a man like that? There is only one correct answer: The power of God.

The church is perhaps outwardly weak today because it views Christ as weak. It may not declare that from the pulpit, but it can practice it with its life. Christ is not weak, elders; Christ is powerful!

He who brought Christian killing Saul to salvation in an hour on the road to Damascus is with His church today in power. He who saved 3,000 on Pentecost by the word of His power is at work today. He who spoke gently to Peter, forgiving his past denial is forgiving today. He who told Peter to feed the flock and gave Him the Spirit to do so, is telling the

³⁶ John 13:37

elders today to do the same thing. He gives them the power of His Spirit and the wisdom of His word to carry out His call.

God brings revival time and time again to a wayward, weary, and worn down church with weak, and all too often worldly, elders. He does so by His Spirit leading elders to do their God ordained work. He will lead them again! When Spurgeon asked members of the Metropolitan Tabernacle to leave one Sunday morning so unbelievers could take their seats and hear the gospel, the whole church emptied and minutes later was completely full again, this time with unbelievers. The Lord saved many that Lord's Day. He saves still. He will save again.

Jesus asks you today: "Do you love me?" If the answer is "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." He gives you this charge: "Feed my sheep. Follow Me!"

When elders pursue their calling with all confidence in the Lord, prayer, and humility, the kingdom of grace will advance, ourselves and others will be brought into it and kept in it, and the kingdom of Glory will be hastened!³⁷

May the Lord grant us a competent portion of His Spirit that we might love Him and serve Him to the end.

³⁷ Westminster Shorter Catechism #102 – *What do we pray for in the Second Petition?*

Point Them to Glory!

Christ's Call to Elders

What is an elder called to be? An older man? A wiser man? A successful man? What motivations should lead a man to desire the office of elder? How can he discern if he is ready to answer his church's call to that office? How can an elder test his work? What will drive an elder forward in his 5th or 45th year of service?

Through Christ's breakfast conversation with Peter in John 21, this booklet examines Christ's call to elders. Elders must be lovers of Christ, lovers of God's word, lovers of Christ's flock, and lovers of the lost. When elders serve Christ in this way the church will flourish. May God gift His church with elders who will serve Christ faithfully to the end.

Will You not revive us again, that Your people may rejoice in You?

Psalm 85:6